

Religious Minorities and Governance in Iraq: Addressing Challenges and Proposing Solutions

Introduction:

Established in 2021, the Iraq Religious Freedom and Anti-Discrimination Roundtable stands as a dedicated platform for advancing religious freedom in Iraq. Comprising experts in the field, the Roundtable has conducted numerous discussions, bringing together religious and community leaders alongside local NGOs. Through these engagements, we have identified persistent challenges in safeguarding religious freedom and protecting minority groups. The Roundtable recognizes the profound challenges within the country's political and cultural structures. Despite pivotal historical events, such as the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime and the defeat of ISIL, obstacles endure. Militias have control over minority areas, demographic shifts occur, and governmental hesitancy to implement crucial laws, coupled with a concerning rise in hate speech, exacerbates deeper systemic issues.

Challenges:

Numerous religious minority groups remain displaced, aspiring to return to their areas. The government's inefficiencies exacerbate the situation, hindering progress. Key concerns involve implementing crucial agreements like the Sinjar agreement and rectifying discriminatory laws. The government's reluctance to implement laws, particularly for Yazidi survivors, adds an extra layer of challenge, further hindering progress.

The mismanagement of Iraq's diverse religious landscape has fuelled conflicts, with existing religious institutions inadvertently fostering violence rather than harmony. The control exerted by militias, ongoing demographic shifts, and the alarming spread of hate speech necessitate urgent and comprehensive reform. Meaningful involvement of marginalized groups in political decision-making processes is paramount, emphasizing the need for a thorough adjustment aligning Iraq's systems with modern principles.

Recommendations:

A strategic and comprehensive approach is imperative, starting with the alignment of religious institutions with Iraqi society and human rights standards. This may involve transforming existing institutions to actively contribute to unity rather than violence. The initiation of a legal framework supporting the development of inclusive religious institutions is a pivotal first step. Recognizing the significance of local engagement involves focusing on building the capacity of local organizations. In education, integrating the co-teaching of various religions into curricula fosters inclusivity and diversity of thought. Additionally, revitalizing the role of universities in promoting religious freedom is crucial, acknowledging the substantial gap in this area. This holistic approach aims to cultivate a more tolerant and harmonious society in Iraq by effectively addressing challenges and proposing tangible solutions.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the complex challenges facing religious minorities in Iraq demand urgent attention and comprehensive solutions. The Iraq Religious Freedom and Anti-Discrimination Roundtable recognizes the misalignment within the nation's political and cultural systems, emphasizing the need for transformative measures. Despite historical milestones, the persistence of challenges, including government reluctance in implementing crucial laws and the alarming prevalence of hate speech, highlights systemic issues. The proposed strategic approach seeks to foster unity, inclusivity, and diversity of thought through the transformation of religious institutions, legal frameworks, and educational practices. By revitalizing local engagement, empowering organizations, and promoting religious freedom, this holistic strategy aspires to contribute to the creation of a more tolerant and harmonious society in Iraq.